



For Immediate Release

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Report: California Workers Face Deep Health Inequities, Future of Work Initiatives Must Address Health-Affirming Work

A report and series of three short films from the Institute for the Future and the Blue Shield of California Foundation explore key connections between work and health outcomes and discuss the need to restructure the role work plays in long-term health and well-being

May 11, 2021, Palo Alto, Calif. – The Institute for the Future (ITF) and Blue Shield of California Foundation have released a series of three short films and a report—[The Future of Work and Its Impact on Health](#)—examining the role work plays in Californians’ short- and long-term health and well-being, and considering how improvements can be made by replacing health-depleting jobs with health-affirming ones. The film series and report identify deep-seated inequities in health risks and vulnerabilities for California workers and call for urgent action today to create better health and economic outcomes by 2030.

“There has been so much attention placed on how work is changing and what that means for the economic security of California workers, but there has been far less focus on how those changes are impacting the health and well-being of workers,” said ITF Health Research Director Rachel Maguire. “We need to understand the new health risks and vulnerabilities that will occur as work changes. A more robust analysis of the intersection of work and health is critical to advancing health equity in our state.”

Combining expert interviews and “ethnographic foresight,” an ITF research method used to understand how people are experiencing the present in ways that are likely to grow and have increasing importance in the future, the report created three potential future scenarios for California’s workers, determined by our actions today. Each scenario is depicted in a short film:

- **Life on Wheels:** Could communities of “vehicular residency”— people living in cars—become the norm for workers and their families who don’t earn enough to pursue other types of living accommodations? If so, will this new form of “housing” feel dystopian? Or could vehicular residency work if the right resources and community benefits are offered?
- **Humans, Automated:** As artificial intelligence systems begin to work “alongside” human workers, doing the more sophisticated STEM work while the humans just worry about demonstrating productivity, how does this affect workers’ morale? How does it affect their mental health when they are constantly monitored and surveilled to ensure they are working as efficiently as possible? To compound the feeling of having no autonomy under the watchful eye of AI co-workers, imagine if the external force of climate change spurs recurring natural disasters and new pandemics. How will these unforeseen forces upend the economic conditions for the state, exacerbating existing health risks, both physical and mental, while creating new ones?
- **Workers First:** What if, before retiring, owners convert their businesses into worker-owned cooperatives, following an employment-ownership model that has already shown success over the years in various U.S. cities? What would this transition look like? What kinds of new skills would workers need to learn, and what kinds of new strengths would they need to acquire? What kinds of innovative actions would it take to scale this innovative approach to tackling extreme wealth inequality?

“The future isn’t preordained, and now is the time to reclaim our future through foresight to empower healthier, resilient, imaginative, and resourceful California workers,” said IFTF Executive Director Marina Gorbis. “Using IFTF future scenarios, our goal is to encourage action today to design better health outcomes for all Californians.”

“Economic insecurity is an under-examined contribution to the deterioration of the health of too many of California’s workers, their families and communities, said Rachel Wick, Senior Program Officer at Blue Shield of California Foundation. “We need to take bold, ambitious actions to how we work to create a healthier and more equitable future for California.”

Watch the three short films and read the report and register for the public conversation here: <https://www.iftf.org/healthandwork2030>

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About Institute for the Future

[Institute for the Future](#) is the world's leading futures organization. For over 50 years, businesses, governments, and social impact organizations have depended upon IFTF global forecasts, custom research, and foresight training to navigate complex change and develop world-ready strategies. IFTF methodologies and toolsets yield coherent views of transformative possibilities across all sectors that together support a more equitable and sustainable future. Institute for the Future is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Palo Alto, California. www.iff.org

About Blue Shield of California Foundation

[Blue Shield of California Foundation](#) is one of the state's largest and most trusted grantmaking organizations. Our mission is to build lasting and equitable solutions that make California the healthiest state and end domestic violence.